MAGAZINE SECTION **THE OGDEN STANDARD** MAGAZINE SECTION

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# Early Trials of Mark Twain Are Revealed in Old Letters

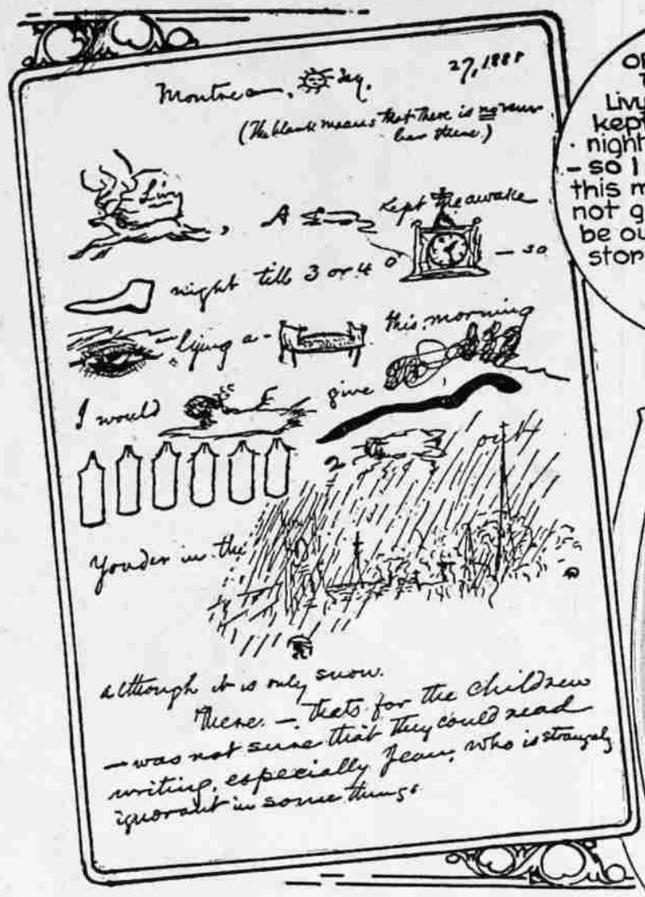
NO person can, through letters that survive the great Missourian, follow Samuel Langhorne Clemens (Mark Twain) through his long and eventful career as printer, pilot, journalist, author, lecturer, publisher and not have a fellow-feeling for him by reason of the confusion of affairs which, in one form or another, pursued him throughout his life.

At an early age young Clemens speeded ahead of his older brothers, and because of his material success took an unnamed and uncontested place at the head of his family. Many of the earlier letters written by Clemens to his mother, Mrs. Jane Clemens, who was residing at the home of her daughter, Mrs. Pamela Moffett, in St. Louis, dealt with financial affairs, and showed the young printer-pilot-writer with worries enough seemingly to preclude any idea of humor—but the sunny disposition refused to be wet-blanketed. Even his letters devoted to gloomy subjects showed exquisite rifts of drollery.

Two volumes, comprising 850 pages, of Mark Twain letters arranged, with comment, by Albert Bigelow Paine, are just off the press (Harper & Bros., publishers).

"Nowhere," writes Paine in the foreword, "is the human being more truly revealed than in his letters. Not in literary letters—prepared with care, and the thought of possible publication—but in those letter wrought out of the press of circumstances, and with no idea of print in mind. A collection of such documents, written by one whose life has become of interest to mankind at large, has a value quite aside from literature, in that it reflects in some degree at least the soul of the writer.

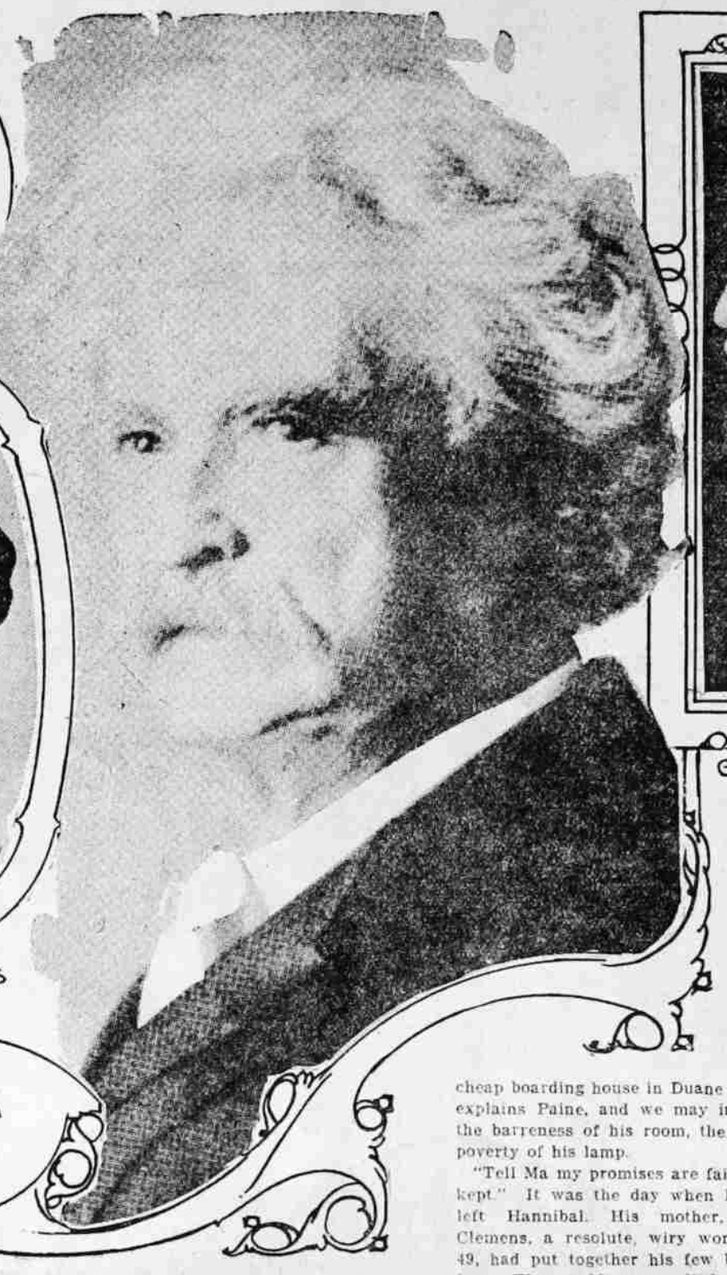
"The letters of Mark Twain are peculiarly of the revealing sort. He was a man of few restraints and of no affectations. In his correspondnce, as in his talk, he spoke what was in his mind, untrammeled by literary conventions."



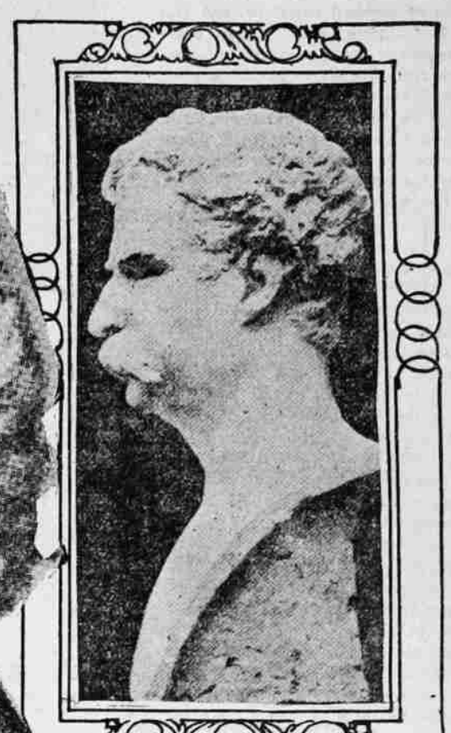

TRANSLATION OF TWAIN REBUS TO HIS WIFE

Livy dear, a mouse kept me awake last night till 3 or 4 o'clock - so I am lying abed this morning. I would not give sixpence to be out yonder in the storm, although it is only snow

MRS CLEMENS about 1885



MARK TWAIN in 1896



GERHARDT'S BUST of MARK TWAIN

### Was a Puny Child.

A biographical summary tells of the removal of John Marshall Clemens—a lawyer by profession, a merchant by vocation—to Florida, Mo., from Jamestown, Tenn. "Five months later," chronicles Paine, "was born a baby boy to whom they gave the name of Samuel—a family name—and added Langhorne, after an old Virginia friend of his father.

"The child was puny, and did not make a very sturdy fight for life. Still he weathered along, season after season, and survived two stronger children, Margaret and Benjamin. By 1839 Judge Clemens had lost faith in Florida. He removed his family to Hannibal, and in this Mississippi river town the little lad whom the world was to know as Mark Twain spent his early life. In Tom Sawyer we have a picture of the Hannibal of those days and the atmosphere of his boyhood there.

"His schooling was brief and of a desultory kind. It ended one day in 1847, when his father died and it became necessary that each one should help somewhat in the domestic crisis. His brother Orion, ten years his senior, was already a printer by trade. Pamela, his sister, also considerably older, had acquired music, and now took a few pupils. The little boy Sam, at 12, was apprenticed to a printer named Ament. His wages consisted of his board and clothes—'more board than clothes,' as he once remarked to the writer.

"He remained with Ament until his brother Orion bought out a small paper in Hannibal in 1850. The paper, in time, was moved into a part of the Clemens home, and the two brothers ran it. A still younger brother, Henry, entered the office as an apprentice. The Hannibal Journal was no great paper from the beginning, and it did not improve with time. Still, it managed to survive—country papers nearly always manage to survive—year after year, bringing in some sort of return. It was of this paper that young Sam Clemens began his writings—burlesque, as a rule, of local characters and conditions—usually published in his brother's absence; generally resulting in trouble on his return. Yet they made the paper sell, and if Orion had but realized his brother's talent he might have turned it into capital even then.

### Pined for the World.

"In 1854 (he was not yet 18) Sam Clemens grew tired of his limitations and pined for the wider horizon of the world. He gave out to his family that he was going to St. Louis, but he kept on to New York, where a world's fair was then going on. In New York he found employment at his trade, and during the hot months of 1853 worked in a printing office in Cliff street. By and by he went to Philadelphia, where he worked a frief time; made a trip to Washington and presently set out for the West again after an absence of more than a year.

"Orion, meanwhile, had established himself at Muscatine, Ia., but soon after removed to Keokuk, where the brothers were once more together, still following their trade. Young Sam Clemens remained in Keokuk until the winter of 1856-57, when he caught a touch of the South American fever then prevalent and decided to go to Brazil. He left Keokuk for Cincinnati, worked that winter in a printing office there, and in April took the little steamer Paul Jones for New Orleans, where he expected to find a South American vessel.

"'In Life on the Mississippi' we have his story of how he met Horace Bixby and decided to become a pilot instead of a South American adventurer—jauntily setting himself the stupendous task of learning the 1,200 miles of the Mississippi river between St. Louis and New Orleans. Yet within eighteen months he had become not only a pilot, but one of the best and most careful pilots on the river, intrusted with some of the largest and most valuable steamers. He continued in that profession for two and a half years longer, and during that time met with no disaster that cost his owners a single dollar for damage.

### Fired on Near St. Louis.

"Then the war broke out. South Carolina seceded in December, 1860, and other states followed. Clemens was in New Orleans in January, 1861, when Louisiana seceded, and his boat was put into the Confederate service and sent up the Red river. His occupation gone he took steamer for the North—the last one before the blockade closed. A blank cartridge was fired at them from Jefferson Barracks when they reached St. Louis, but they did not understand the signal and kept on. Presently a shell carried away part of the pilothouse and considerably disturbed its inmates. They realized, then, that war had really begun.

"In those days Clemens' sympathies were with the South. He hurried up to Hannibal and enlisted with a company of young fellows who were recruiting with the avowed purpose of "throwing off the yoke of the invader." They were ready for the field presently and set out in good order, a sort of nondescript cavalry detachment, mounted on animals more picturesque than beautiful. Still, it was a resolute band and might have done very well, only it rained a good deal, which made soldiering disagreeable and hard. Lieut. Clemens resigned at the end of two weeks and decided to go to Nevada with Orion, who was a Union abolitionist and had received an appointment from Lincoln as secretary of the new territory.

### Assumes Nam Mark Twain.

"'In Roughing It' Mark Twain gives us the story of the overland journey made by the two brothers and a picture of experiences at the other end—true in aspect, even if here and there elaborated in detail. He was Orion's private secretary, but there was no private secretary work to do and no salary attached to the position. The incumbent presently went to mining, adding that to his other trades.

"He became a professional miner, but not a rich one. He was at Aurora, Cal., in the Esmeralda district, skimping along, with not much to eat and to wear, when he was summoned by Joe Goodman, owner and editor of the Virginia City Enterprise, to come up and take the local editorship of that paper. He had been contributing sketches to it now and then, under the pen-name of "Josh," and Goodman, a man of fine literary instinct, recognized a talent full of possibilities. This was in the late summer of 1862. Clemens walked 130 miles over very bad roads to take the job, and arrived wayworn and travel-stained. He began on a salary of $25 a week, picking up news items here and there, and contributing occasional sketches— burlesques, hoaxes and the like. When the Legislature convened at Carson City he was sent down to report it, and then, for the first time, began signing his articles "Mark Twain," a river term, used in making soundings, recalled from his piloting days.

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"He left Carson City one day, after becoming involved in a duel, the result of an editorial squib written in Goodman's absence, and went across the Sierras to San Francisco. He attached himself to the Morning Call.

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"The connection with the Call was not congenial. In due course it came to a natural end, and Mark Twain arranged to do a daily San Francisco letter for his old paper, the Enterprise. The Enterprise letters stirred up trouble. They citicised the police of San Francisco so severely that the officials found means of making the writer's life there difficult and comfortless. With Jim Gillis, brother of a printer of whom he was fond and who had been the indirect cause of his troubles, he went up into Calaveras county, to a cabin on Jackass Hill. Jim Gillis, a lovable picturesque character (the Truthful James of Bret Harte), owned mining claims. Mark Twain decided to spend his vacation in pocket mining, and soon added that science to his store of knowledge. It was a halcyon, happy three months that he lingered there, but did not make his fortune; he only laid the cornerstone.

"They tried their fortune at Angel's Camp, a place well known to readers of Bret Harte. But it rained pretty steadily, and they put in most of their time huddled around the single stove of the dingy hotel of Angel's, telling yarns. Among the stories was one told by a dreary narrator named Ben Coon. It was about a frog that had been trained to jump, but failed to win a wager because the owner of a rival frog had surreptitiously loaded him with shot. The story had been circulated among the camps, but Mark Twain had never heard it until then. The tale and the tiresome fashion of its telling amused him. He made notes to remember it."

### Missed a Fortune.

Their stay in Angel's Camp came presently to an end. One day, when the mining partners were following the specks of gold that led to a pocket somewhere up the hill, a chill, dreary rain set in. Jim, as usual, was washing, and Clemens was carrying water. The "color" became better and better as they ascended, and Gillis, possessed with the mining passion, would have gone on, regardless of the rain. Clemens, however, protested, and declared that each pail of water was his last. Finally he said in his deliberate drawl:

"Jim, I won't carry any more water. This work is too disagreeable. Let's go to the house and wait till it clears up."

"Gillis had just taken out a pan of earth. 'Bring one more pail, Sam,' he pleaded.

"'I won't do it, Jim! Not a drop! Not if I knew there was a million dollars in that pan!'

"They left the pan standing there and went back to Angel's Camp. The rain contined and they returned to Jackass Hill without visiting their claim again. Meantime the rain had washed away the top of the pan of earth left standing on the slope above Angel's, and exposed a handful of nuggets—pure gold. Two strangers came along and, observing it, had sat down to wait until the thirty-day claim notice posted by Jim Gillis should expire. They did not mind the rain—not with that gold in sight—and the minute the thirty days were up they followed the lead a few pans further, and took out—some say ten, some say twenty thousand dollars. It was a good pocket. Mark Twain missed it by one pail of water.

"Undecided as to his plans, he was one day advised by a friend to deliver a lecture. He was already known as an entertaining talker, and his adviser judged his possibilities well. In 'Roughing It' we find the story of that first lecture and its success. He followed it with other lectures up and down the coast. He had added one more profession to his intellectual stock in trade.

"Mark Twain, now provided with money, decided to pay a visit to his people. He set out for the East in December, 1866, via Panama, arriving in New York in January. A few days later he was with his mother, then living with his sister in St. Louis. A little later he lectured in Keokuk, and in Hannibal, his old home."

### Comes "Innocents Abroad."

Following a tour of the Orient, During which Clemens contributed regularly to the Alta-California and the New York Tribune, he returned to find himself famous. Getting material of his travels in manuscript form, Twain presented it to the printers of his first book, "Innocents Abroad," and while the book was being printed the author lectured throughout the East and Middle West, making headquarters part of the time in Elmira, N. Y.

"He had," continues the biographical summary in "Mark Twain Letters" just published, "an especial reason for going to Elmira. On the Quaker City he had met a young man by the name of Charles Langdon, and one day, in the Bay of Smyrna, had seen a miniature of the boy's sister, Olivia Langdon, then a girl of about 22. He fell in love with that picture, and still more deeply in love with the original when he met her in Now York on his return. The Langdon home was in Elmira, and it was for this reason that as time passed he frequently sojourned there. When the proofs of the 'Innocents Abroad' were sent him he took them along, and he and sweet 'Livy' Langdon read them together. What he lacked in those days in literary delicacy she detected, and together they pruned it away. She became his editor that winter—a position which she held until her death.

"The book was published in July, 1869, and its success was immediate and abundant."

It was not until he was 17 years old that Sam Clemens wrote a letter, any portion of which has survived. No scrawls to some school sweetheart—to "Becky Thatcher," perhaps—none to Tom Sawyer's prototype. Not a penciled note to Huck Finn. Nothing comes down even from his apprenticeship and early journeyman printer days. Even the contributions which pleased and horrified the residents of Hannibal—according to which side of the fence they were on—though the columns of the Hannibal Journal, owned by his brother, Orion, have disappeared, not a single copy of that publication being obtainable.

### Struggles in New York.

The first letter, any portion of which exists today, is one written by Clemens after he cast his lot away from home. Dissatisfied with the prospects in Missouri and lending action to a desire to see the world, Clemens tore himself away from his intimates at Hannibal and journeyed to St. Louis, where his sister, Pamela, was living and then to New York City, where a world's fair was in progress. The letter, written in 1853, was to his sister in St. Louis and detailed his impressions of the fair at the Crystal Palace.

Twain, during his New York visit, possibly was not becoming rich very rapidly, and said in the letter above referred to:

"Four times every day I walk a little over one mile; and working hard all day, and walking four miles, is exercise—I am used to it, now, though, and it is no trouble. Tell Ma my promises are faithfully kept, and if I have my health will take her to Ky. in the spring—I shall save money for this. You ask me where I spend my evenings. Where would you suppose, with a free printers' library containing more than 4,000 volumes within a quarter of a mile of me, and nobody at home to talk to? I have written this by a light so dim that you nor Ma could not read by it."

He was lodging in a mechanics' cheap boarding house in Duane street, explains Paine, and we may imagine the barreness of his room, the feeble poverty of his lamp.

"Tell Ma my promises are faithfully kept." It was the day when he had left Hannibal. His mother, Jane Clemens, a resolute, wiry woman of 49, had put together his few belongings. Then, holding up a little Testament:

"I want you to take hold of the end of this, Sam," she said, "and make me a promise. I want you to repeat after me these words: 'I do solemnly swear that I will not throw a card, or drink a drop of liquor while I am gone.'" It was this oath, repeated after her, that he was keeping so faithfully.

Living and in vigor today, Twain probably would have been one of the army that is given to commenting in letters to his favorite editor on the actions of fellows in public conveyances. The second Twain letter presented in Mr. Paine's compilation was written to his brother, Orion. Twain had gone to Philadelphia, where he was "subbing" at the Enquirer office, going to work at 7 o'clock in the evening and laboring as a printer until 3 in the morning.

"There is one fine custom in Philadelphia," relates Clemens in the letter to Orion. "A gentleman is always expected to hand up a lady's money (in a 'bus) for her. Yesterday I sat in the front end of the 'bus, directly under the driver's box—a lady sat opposite me. She handed me her money, which was right. But, Lord! a St. Louis lady would think herself ruined, if she should be so familiar with a stranger.

"In St. Louis a man will sit in the front end of the stage and see a lady stagger from the far end, to pay her fare. The Philadelphia 'bus drivers cannot cheat. In the front of the stage is a thing like an office clock, with flures from 0 to 40, marked on its face. When the stage starts, the hand of the clock is turned toward the 0. When you get in and pay your fare, the driver strikes a bell, and the hand moves to the figure 1—that is, 'one fare, and paid for,' and there is your receipt, as good as if you had it in your pocket. When a passenger pays his fare and the driver does not strike the bell immediately, he is greeted, 'Strike that bell! will you?'

"I must close now. I intend visiting the navy yard, mint, etc., before I write again. You must write often. You see I have nothing to write interesting to you, while you can write nothing that will not interest me. Don't say my letters are not long enough. Tell Jim Wolfe to write. Tell all the boys where I am, and to write. Jim Robinson, particularly. I wrote to him from New York. Tell me all that is going on in H—l. Truly your brother. SAM."

### H—l in a Poem.

"'H—l' is his abbreviation for Hannibal," explains Paine. "He had first used it in a title of a poem which a few years before, during one of Orion's absences, he had published in the paper. 'To Mary in Hannibal' was too long to set as a display head in single column. The poem had no great merit, but under the abbreviated title it could hardly fail to invite notice. It was one of several things he did to liven up the circulation during a brief period of his authority.

Young Clemens no doubt became fearfully homesick at times, as is indicated in another letter to Orion, who, in the meantime, had moved to Muscatine, Ia., and established the Journal. "How do you like 'free soil?'" Sam asked. "I would like amazingly to see a good old-fashioned negro."

Fort Sumter was fired upon. Mark Twain had made his last trip as a pilot upon the river to St. Louis—the nation was plunged into a four years' conflict.

There are no letters of this immediate period. Young Clemens went to Hannibal, and enlisting in a private company, composed mostly of old schoolmates, went soldiering for two rainy, inglorious weeks, by the end of which he had had enough of war, and furthermore, had discovered that he was more of a Union abolitionist than a slave-holding secessionist, as he had at first supposed.

Orion was a stanch Unionist, and a member of Lincoln's cabinet had offered him the secretaryship of the new Territory of Nevada. Orion had accepted and only needed funds to carry him to his destination. His pilot brother had the funds, and upon being appointed "private" secretary, agreed to pay both passages on the overland stage, which would bear them across the great plains from St. Jo to Carson City.

Mark Twain in "Roughing It" has described that glorious journey and the frontier life that followed it. His letters form a supplement of realism to a tale that is more or less fictitious, though marvelously true in color and background. The first bears no date, but it was written not long after their arrival, August 14, 1861. It is not complete, but there is enough of it to give us a very fair picture of Carson City, "a wooden town; its population 2,000 souls."

Disappointments were many for young Clemens in the barren hills of Nevada and he saw fortune glide from under his fingers many times. It was about the end of August, 1862, when he finally abandoned the struggle, gave up 'mining, and, with a pack on his shoulders, walked over the mountains to Virginia City to claim at last his rightful inheritance. It was in the midst of his work on the Virginia City Enterprise, while "handling" the Legislature at Carson, that young Clemens first signed "Mark Twain" to a news letter. This was February 2, 1868, and from that time the name was attached to all of Samuel Clemens' work.

Later, in the fall of 1864, Twain is found a member of the Call staff in San Francisco, and in March, 1866, he was sent by a Sacramento paper to the Sandwich Islands. Returning to California and venturing a lecture tour of Nevada and California, which proved successful, Twain went to New York. After a short visit to his mother and sister in St. Louis he returned East.

In New York Twain found himself no longer unknown to the metropolis or to any portion of America. Then came the upgrade, a time when publishers wanted his manuscript, and his progress to fame was fast.